Component of Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 89-645-X
Social and Aboriginal Statistics Division

Article

Aboriginal Language Indicators for Off-reserve First Nations Children Under the Age of Six in Canada

by Evelyne Bougie, Heather Tait and Elisabeth Cloutier

June 2010

Statistics Canada Statistique Canada

Canada

How to obtain more information

For information about this product or the wide range of services and data available from Statistics Canada, visit our website at *www.statcan.gc.ca*, e-mail us at *infostats@statcan.gc.ca*, or telephone us, Monday to Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., at the following numbers:

Statistics Canada's National Contact Centre

Toll-free telephone (Canada and the United States):	
Inquiries line	1-800-263-1136
National telecommunications device for the hearing impaired	1-800-363-7629
Fax line	1-877-287-4369
Local or international calls:	
Inquiries line	1-613-951-8116
Fax line	1-613-951-0581
Depository Services Program	
Inquiries line	1-800-635-7943
Fax line	1-800-565-7757

To access this product

This product, catalogue no. 89-643-X is available for free in alternate format. To obtain a single issue visit our website at *www.statcan.gc.ca* and select "Publications."

Standards of service to the public

Statistics Canada is committed to serving its clients in a prompt, reliable and courteous manner. To this end, Statistics Canada has developed *standards of service* that its employees observe. To obtain a copy of these service standards, please contact Statistics Canada toll-free at 1-800-263-1136. The service standards are also published on *www.statcan.gc.ca* under "About us" > "Providing services to Canadians."

Statistics Canada
Social and Aboriginal Statistics Division

Aboriginal Language Indicators for Off-reserve First Nations Children Under the Age of Six in Canada

Published by authority of the Minister responsible for Statistics Canada

© Minister of Industry, 2010

All rights reserved. The content of this electronic publication may be reproduced, in whole or in part, and by any means, without further permission from Statistics Canada, subject to the following conditions: that it be done solely for the purposes of private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary, and/or for non-commercial purposes; and that Statistics Canada be fully acknowledged as follows: Source (or "Adapted from", if appropriate): Statistics Canada, year of publication, name of product, catalogue number, volume and issue numbers, reference period and page(s). Otherwise, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form, by any means—electronic, mechanical or photocopy—or for any purposes without prior written permission of Licensing Services, Client Services Division, Statistics Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1A 0T6.

June 2010

Catalogue no. 89-643-X

ISBN 978-1-100-16162-4

Frequency: Occasional

Ottawa

Cette publication est également disponible en français.

Note of appreciation

Canada owes the success of its statistical system to a long-standing partnership between Statistics Canada, the citizens of Canada, its businesses, governments and other institutions. Accurate and timely statistical information could not be produced without their continued cooperation and goodwill.

User information

Symbols

The following standard symbols are used in Statistics Canada publications:

.	not available for any reference period
..	not available for a specific reference period
...	not applicable
0	true zero or a value rounded to zero
0s	value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded
p	preliminary
r	revised
x	suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*
E	use with caution
F	too unreliable to be published

Background

The 2006 Census of Population recorded over 60 different Aboriginal languages spoken by First Nations people in Canada. The long-term viability of some languages, such as Cree and Ojibway, is considered to be more probable than other languages spoken by First Nations people because of their relatively larger base of speakers (Norris 2007). According to the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the passing down of Aboriginal languages across the generations was greatly disrupted by residential schools in Canada, where Aboriginal language use was prohibited. The Royal Commission also notes that the revitalization of Aboriginal languages in Canada is a key component for building both healthy individuals and healthy communities.

Given that many Aboriginal languages in Canada are endangered (Norris 2004, 2007), the language knowledge of today's young First Nations children is important in documenting language survival trends. This fact sheet provides an Aboriginal language profile of off-reserve First Nations children under the age of six in Canada. The 2006 Aboriginal Children's Survey is used to provide broad indicators of off-reserve First Nations children's experiences with Aboriginal languages. The Aboriginal Children's Survey includes First Nations children living off reserve in the provinces and all First Nations children living in the territories.

Young First Nations children in Canada

First Nations children are a growing proportion among all children in Canada, particularly in some western provinces (Manitoba and Saskatchewan) and in the Yukon and the Northwest Territories. In 2006, the Census enumerated about 86,215 First Nations children under the age of six across Canada, 81% of whom were registered or Treaty Indians.

According to the 2006 Census of Population, First Nations children with registered Indian status and who live on reserve are much more likely to have an Aboriginal language as their mother tongue (or first language learned). For instance, 37% of First Nations children under the age of six who were registered Indians and who were living on reserve at the time of the 2006 Census had an Aboriginal mother tongue.[1] This figure was much lower off reserve, where 6% of First Nations children with registered Indian status and 1% of those without registered Indian status had an Aboriginal mother tongue.

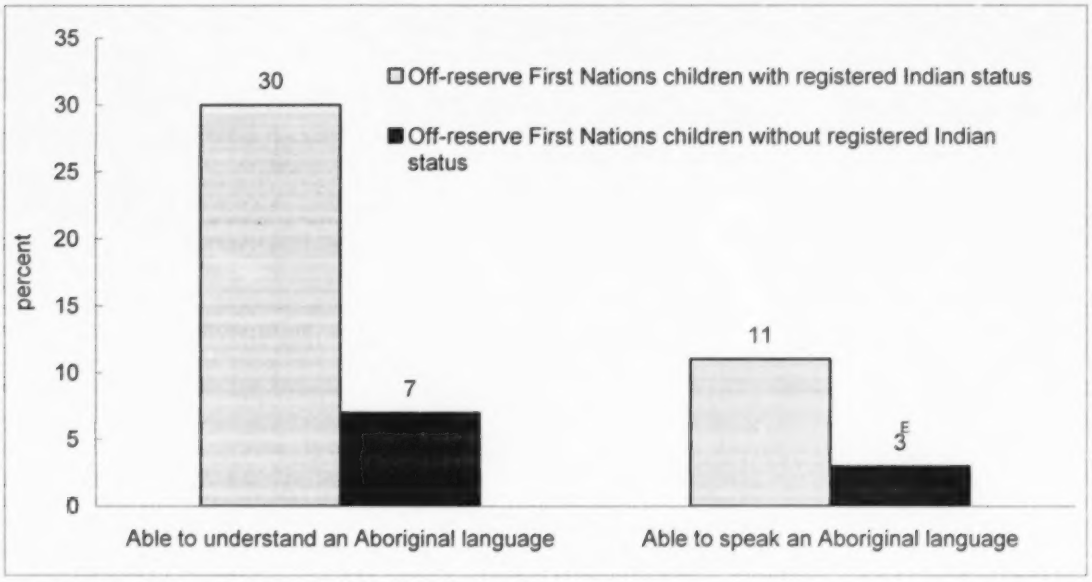
1. There were 22 incompletely enumerated Indian reserves and settlements in the 2006 Census. Data for these areas are not available and are not included in tabulations.

Speaking and understanding Aboriginal languages

In the 2006 Aboriginal Children's Survey, parents were asked about the language(s) that their child could understand when someone spoke to them in that language, as well as the language(s) in which their child could express their needs (regardless of whether these were learned as mother tongues or as second languages).

- One-fifth (20%) of off-reserve First Nations children aged 2 to 5—the age at which children are usually able to speak—were able to understand an Aboriginal language, and about 7% were able to express their needs in an Aboriginal language.
- Cree and Ojibway were the languages understood and spoken by the largest number of off-reserve First Nations children.
- Off-reserve First Nations children with registered Indian status were more likely to be able to understand and speak an Aboriginal language than their counterparts without registered Indian status (see chart 1).

Chart 1
Proportion of off-reserve First Nations children aged 2 to 5 able to understand and speak an Aboriginal language, by registered Indian status, 2006



Source(s): Statistics Canada, Aboriginal Children's Survey, 2006.

- The Northwest Territories had the largest proportions of First Nations children aged 2 to 5 who were able to understand (54%) and speak (21%) an Aboriginal language. Aboriginal language knowledge was also higher than the national estimate in Saskatchewan (at 32% for understanding and 11% for speaking) and in the Yukon (at 33% for understanding).

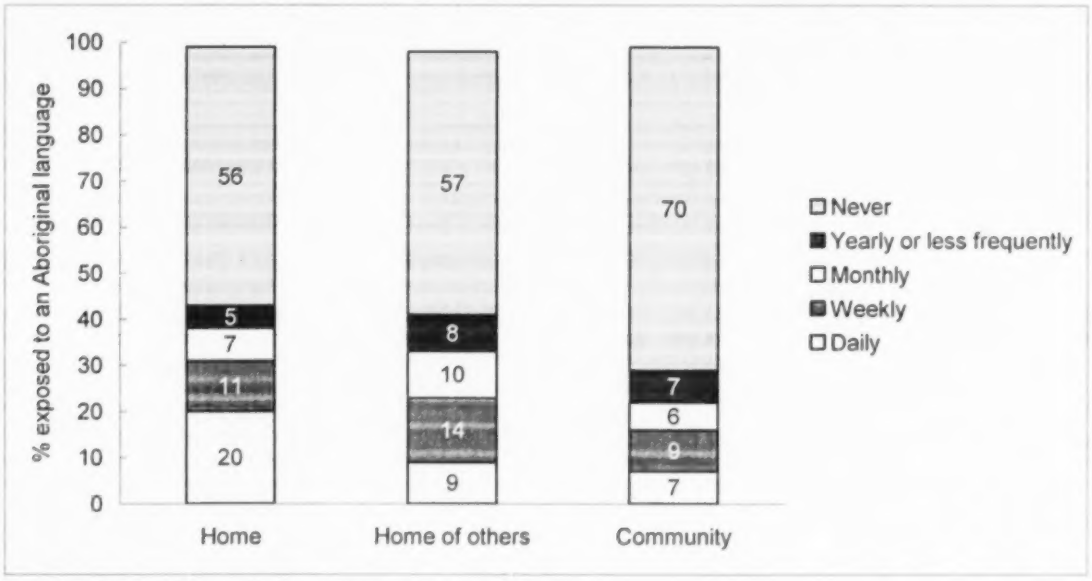
- The vast majority of off-reserve First Nations children who know an Aboriginal language appear to be learning it alongside a non-Aboriginal language (i.e., English and/or French). About 98% of First Nations children who understood an Aboriginal language could also understand English and/or French. Similarly, 94% of First Nations children who spoke an Aboriginal language could also speak English and/or French.

Exposure to Aboriginal languages at home and in the community

First Nations children can be exposed to Aboriginal languages in many different settings: at home, in the home of others, in their community, through media, and/or in the context of their regular daycare arrangements.

- According to the Aboriginal Children's Survey, off-reserve First Nations children under the age of six are exposed to Aboriginal languages in a variety of settings, but most frequently at home. One-fifth (20%) of off-reserve First Nations children were exposed to an Aboriginal language on a daily basis at home. In comparison, 9% had daily exposure to an Aboriginal language in the home of others, and 7% in the community (see chart 2).

Chart 2
Proportion of off-reserve First Nations children under the age of six who were exposed to an Aboriginal language at home, in the home of others, and in the community, by frequency of exposure, 2006



Source(s): Statistics Canada, Aboriginal Children's Survey, 2006.

- Focusing on daily exposure, about 11% of off-reserve First Nations children had daily exposure to an Aboriginal language exclusively at home, while 2% had daily exposure exclusively outside of their homes (i.e., in the home of others and/or in the community). About 9% were exposed to an Aboriginal language on a daily basis both at home and outside of home. Three-quarters (78%) of off-reserve First Nations children did not have daily exposure to an Aboriginal language in any of these settings (i.e., at home, in the home of others, or in the community).

- Another source of Aboriginal language exposure is the media. About 5% of off-reserve First Nations children were exposed to an Aboriginal language on a daily basis through media (such as TV, DVDs, radio or books). An additional 8% were exposed on a weekly basis, and 5% on a monthly basis.

- First Nations children can also get exposure to Aboriginal languages in the context of their child care arrangements. This refers to the regular care of a child, on a consistent basis, by someone other than a parent, including daycare, nursery or preschool, Head Start and care by a relative or other caregiver. About 47% of off-reserve First Nations children under the age of six were in some kind of child care arrangements. Looking at the main child care arrangement of young off-reserve First Nations children, where the child spends the most time, about 15% were in arrangements where Aboriginal languages were used.

Aboriginal language exposure and family characteristics

- Off-reserve First Nations children who had a parent with an Aboriginal mother tongue were much more likely to be exposed to an Aboriginal language on a daily basis at home (60%) than children whose parent had a non-Aboriginal language as their mother tongue (12%). About 17% of off-reserve First Nations children under the age of six had at least one parent whose mother tongue was an Aboriginal language.

- First Nations children are growing up in diverse households. One-fifth (20%) of off-reserve First Nations children were living in a family where both parents self-identified as an Aboriginal person, and 32% were living with a lone Aboriginal parent. About 32% were living in a family composed of one Aboriginal and one non-Aboriginal parent, 8% were living with a lone non-Aboriginal parent, and 5% with two non-Aboriginal parents.

- Off-reserve First Nations children who lived in families where both parents or the lone parent self-identified as an Aboriginal person were more likely to be exposed to an Aboriginal language on a daily basis at home (32%) than children who lived in families composed of at least one non-Aboriginal parent (i.e., one Aboriginal and one non-Aboriginal parent, a lone non-Aboriginal parent, or two non-Aboriginal parents) (7%).

- Daily home exposure to an Aboriginal language was higher among off-reserve First Nations children who lived in families where grandparents were present (29%) than among children who did not live with their grandparents (19%). Data from the 2006 Census of Population show that Aboriginal mother tongues are more common among older generations of First Nations people. About 11% of off-reserve First Nations children under the age of six were living with their grandparents.

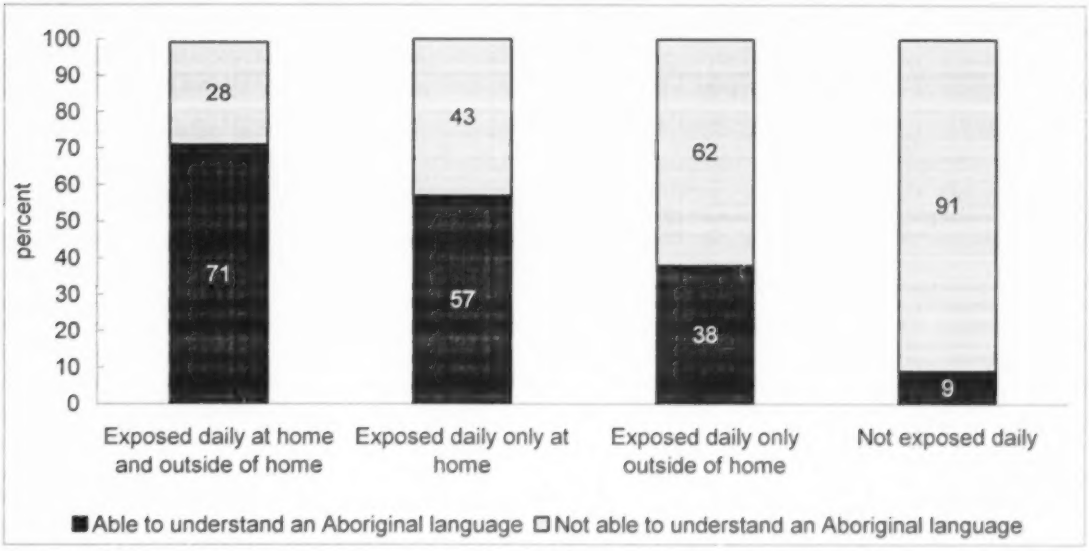
Daily exposure and knowledge of Aboriginal languages

Knowledge of an Aboriginal language among off-reserve First Nations children aged 2 to 5 appears to be associated with it being used on a daily basis, at home and outside of home (i.e., in the home of others and/or in the community).

- Off-reserve First Nations children who did not have daily exposure to an Aboriginal language at home or outside of home were the least likely to be able to understand an Aboriginal language at 9% (see chart 3). This compared to 38% for children who were exposed to an Aboriginal language on a daily basis only outside of home, and 57% for children who were exposed to an Aboriginal language on a daily basis only at home.

- Off-reserve First Nations children who were exposed to an Aboriginal language on a daily basis both at home and outside of home were much more likely to be able to understand an Aboriginal language at 71%.

Chart 3
Proportion of off-reserve First Nations children aged 2 to 5 able to understand an Aboriginal language, by daily exposure to Aboriginal languages in different contexts, 2006



Note: Figures for 'outside of home' combine exposure at the home of others and exposure in the community.
Source(s): Statistics Canada, Aboriginal Children's Survey, 2006.

Hopes and expectations of parents

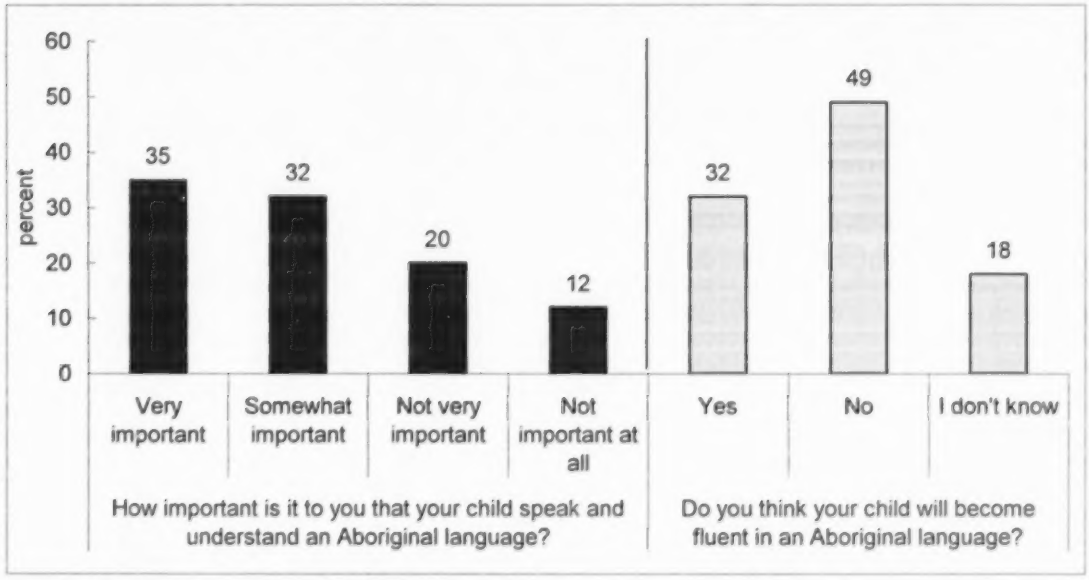
In the 2006 Aboriginal Children's Survey, parents were asked how important it was to them that their child speaks and understands an Aboriginal language, and if they thought their child would become fluent in an Aboriginal language.

- The majority of off-reserve First Nations children under the age of six had parents who believed in the importance of knowing an Aboriginal language: 67% had parents who thought it important ('very' or 'somewhat') that their child speaks and understands an Aboriginal language (see chart 4).

- When parents were asked if they thought their child would become fluent in an Aboriginal language, however, only about one-third (32%) of off-reserve First Nations children were expected to become fluent (see chart 4). Expectations of fluency rose to 65% for children who were exposed to an Aboriginal language on a daily basis, at home and/or outside of home.

- This gap between parents' language hopes and expectations for their children suggests that parents appear to be committed to the passing down of Aboriginal languages to future generations, but may perceive obstacles in doing so. These findings could point to the importance of resources and opportunities for young off-reserve First Nations children to be exposed to and speak Aboriginal languages in a variety of settings—at home and in the broader community.

Chart 4
Proportion of off-reserve First Nations children under the age of six whose parent thought it important that their child speak and understand an Aboriginal language, and thought their child would become fluent in an Aboriginal language, 2006



Source(s): Statistics Canada, Aboriginal Children's Survey, 2006.

What you should know about this fact sheet

The Aboriginal Children's Survey was developed by Statistics Canada and Aboriginal advisors from across the country and was conducted jointly with Human Resources and Social Development Canada. The survey took place between October 2006 and March 2007. Parents or guardians of approximately 10,500 Aboriginal children under six years of age, including more than 5,100 First Nations children, provided information through a combination of personal and telephone interviews. The overall response rate for the survey was 81.1%.

The Aboriginal Children's Survey includes First Nations children living off reserve in the provinces and all First Nations children living in the territories.

For this survey, the parent or guardian responded on behalf of the child. For the majority of off-reserve First Nations children (89%), this person was the birth mother or father. Grandparents, foster parents, and adoptive parents made up the majority of the remaining parents or guardians who responded to the survey for off-reserve First Nations children.

In this fact sheet, 'First Nations children' include children whose parents or guardians identified them as First Nations children on the Aboriginal Children's Survey in response to the question: 'Is (child) an Aboriginal person, that is, North American Indian, Métis or Inuk?' Please note that children were identified as 'North American Indian'; however the term 'First Nations' is used in this fact sheet. First Nations children include those who were identified as First Nations only and those identified as First Nations in combination with another Aboriginal group, either Métis or Inuit.

Data on mother tongue are only available for the parent or guardian who responded to the survey but not for their spouse/partner, nor for their child.

For more detailed information on the survey, please consult the *'Aboriginal Children's Survey 2006 Concepts and Methods Guide'* (Statistics Canada catalogue number 89-634).

There are instances where data is presented separately for First Nations children with and without registered Indian status. Registered Indians or 'status Indians' are people who are entitled to have their names included on the Indian Register, an official list maintained by the federal government. Certain criteria determine who can be registered as a status Indian. Only registered Indians are recognized as Indians under the *Indian Act*, which defines an Indian as 'a person who, pursuant to this act, is registered as an Indian or is entitled to be registered as an Indian.' Status Indians are entitled to certain rights and benefits under the law.

References

Norris, Mary Jane. 2004. 'From generation to generation: Survival and maintenance of Canada's Aboriginal languages, within families, communities and cities'. *TESL Canada Journal*, Vol. 21, pp. 1-16.

Norris, Mary Jane. 2007. 'Aboriginal languages in Canada: Emerging trends and perspectives on second language acquisition'. *Canadian Social Trends*, Vol. 83, pp. 19-27 (Statistics Canada catalogue number 11-008).

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. 1996. 'Gathering strength', Vol. 3 in the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*. Ottawa: Government of Canada.